
GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA



EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

Committee on Government Reform
United States House of Representatives

The Honorable Thomas M. Davis, III, Chairman
The Honorable Henry A. Waxman, Ranking Member

***OVERSIGHT HEARING ON
THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM***

Testimony of
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City Administrator

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Good morning Chairman Davis, Ranking Member Waxman and members of the Government Reform Committee. I am Robert C. Bobb, City Administrator of the District of Columbia and I am pleased to testify on behalf of the Williams Administration regarding our work with the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and our support for public education. First, I would like to thank you Chairman Davis, on behalf of the Mayor, for the leadership, support and encouragement you have provided our great city.

As you know, education is a major priority for the Mayor and his administration. In the District of Columbia, every child, regardless of the school they attend, can and should have access to a high quality education in a healthy and safe environment. In order to achieve this, the leaders of this city must collectively work to ensure that every young person 1) comes to school ready to learn, and leaves with the necessary skills to be successful in our increasingly complex world; 2) is taught to be a responsible citizen and make valuable contributions to their local and global community; and 3) has access to necessary resources that support learning. We have made major progress, but we still have a long way to go before realizing this vision.

First, I will highlight a few of the good things that have happened in and with the District's schools over the last year. The Mayor, Chairman of the Council, and I participated in the Board of Education's search for a new school superintendent. We are pleased that the process resulted in the selection of Dr. Clifford Janey. Under Dr. Janey's leadership we have witnessed a renewed sense of urgency in identifying and addressing the systemic challenges plaguing DCPS, and a strong commitment to improving the quality of teaching and learning. In his short tenure, Dr. Janey has brought new academic standards and curricula to our system and is ably leading the charge to level the academic playing field for all students. In November 2004, we launched the DC Education Compact, which is a historic partnership of various stakeholders across the city, including the philanthropic, business, advocacy and parent communities, to improve outcomes for our children. This effort has also helped to re-open lines of communication and has sparked a renewed sense of collegiality. For the first time, the Superintendent and his senior staff now participate in Executive Cabinet and Senior Staff

meetings, to identify and resolve cross-cutting issues and increase opportunities for interagency collaboration.

As we move forward to address the many challenges facing DCPS, the Mayor and I remain committed to supporting Dr. Janey in his efforts to reform our system and better serve public school students. We are focused on initiatives that will improve academic achievement and building capacity and infrastructure to sustain systemic reform. The primary objective of the Williams Administration is to provide both financial resources and necessary supports to successfully implement the Superintendent's strategic plan, which reflects the education goals of the Council, School Board and citizens of the District of Columbia.

In terms of funding, during the Mayor's tenure, he and the Council have increased the public education operating budget from approximately \$559 million in FY 1995 to approximately \$961 million in FY 2005, and have added over \$350 million additional local dollars to DCPS alone. During that same time, the Mayor and Council provided \$1 billion in capital funding to DCPS, representing approximately 25 percent of the city's entire capital budget.

Further, the Mayor remains committed to maximizing local investment in public schools. The FY 2006 Proposed Budget includes a total of \$1 billion in local funds to educate an estimated 80,000 students within the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools. This funding level represents an increase of \$81.6 million, or nine percent, over the FY 2005 budget. The FY 2006 budget is aligned with the Superintendent's core budget request of \$775 million and provides an additional \$25 million to support strategic educational investments in academic and support services, at both DCPS and charter schools, and funds 11 new charter schools. This budget also provides \$147 million in capital funding to support the rehabilitation and modernization of DCPS school buildings. We look forward to the completion of the Council of Great City Schools comparative finance study that will explore what it truly costs to adequately educate children in our urban environment; review the District's current

public education budgeting and expenditures practices; and provide recommendations on future funding.

In addition to funding, the Mayor plays a central role in aligning District agencies to support the non-academic needs of students, such as nutritional, physical and mental health, and other social services that are vital to their educational success. The Williams Administration has been involved in various interagency collaborations, such as the Transformations Schools Initiative, School-Based Mental Health Services, and the School Health Program, in an effort to provide wrap-around services to the neediest students.

The District's Office of the Deputy Mayor for Children Youth Families and Elders partnered with DCPS to offer mental and social services, provided by counselors and health professionals, to the children and families at low-performing schools. In fact, the Transformation Schools Initiative was a pilot for the expansion of mental health services to several other schools in communities in need. As the school system transitions from the Transformation Schools to the Effective Schools Initiative, we look forward to working with Dr. Janey to continue providing the necessary wrap-around services at the newly identified schools.

Currently, the School Based Mental Health Program provides supports to 29 public schools across the city. The FY 2006 Budget will expand services to 15 new schools clustered in two of our targeted New Communities. The New Communities are high poverty areas with underperforming public schools and underutilized public facilities, scourged by violent crime, economic segregation, and a lack of services and affordable housing.

Our approach is simple - the Department of Mental Health places one qualified, culturally competent mental health professional in each of the 29 schools. These professionals, who split their time between prevention, early intervention and targeted interventions, are focused on breaking down barriers to learning, not pathologizing the school or the students. Program staff often intervene with gangs to reduce problems in other schools and work with families and

community-based organizations. They are active in after-school programs and summer youth programs.

The School Based Mental Health Services approach is efficient, cost effective and highly valued by teachers, students, families and school administrators. A recent Progress Report demonstrated that in the schools where mental health staff are working, there are fewer suspensions, fewer referrals to special education and improved school climate.

The D.C. Department of Health School Health Program supports a .5 FTE school nurse (i.e. at least 20 hours of nursing coverage per week) in each of the 150 D.C. public schools. School nurses provide first aid in the event of an accident or other injury, assess students' health needs, provide health education and preventive health screenings, administer medications and medical procedures as appropriate, refer them for follow-up care if necessary, and also help ensure that students get required immunizations. DCPS provides additional resources to double the number of nursing hours, to 40 hours, in 30 schools. Additionally, the Mayor's proposed FY 2006 budget includes funding for a school health initiative that would make it possible for new charter schools to have nurses on site as soon as they open, as well as ensuring that all school nurses have basic supplies.

We are very pleased with the success of these three initiatives, but we fully acknowledge that there is room for significant improvement in the area of interagency coordination. We must work collaboratively, whenever and wherever possible, to ensure greater efficiency and effectiveness of our efforts and to better leverage our limited resources. In particular, one area that could benefit from greater collaboration is school facilities, which has significant challenges.

One major challenge impacting not only our public schools but all facilities across the city is the structural imbalance, which prevents us from fully funding our capital needs.¹ Over

¹ Documented in the May 2003 GAO report, "District of Columbia: Structural Imbalance and Management Issues"

the last generation, there has been tremendous disinvestment in our basic infrastructure and facilities. Over the six year period from 2003-2008, the District's total capital needs are \$5.8 billion, but we have only been able to fund \$3.3 billion. Of the total needs, \$2.1 billion is for deferred maintenance, and over 50% of that is for schools. Our ability to borrow additional funds is significantly constrained by the fact that we have the highest debt per capita in the nation. Since our current borrowing capacity and revenue are not enough to meet our basic needs, we must continue to defer infrastructure maintenance and spending on new capital projects.

Currently, a tremendous amount of community revitalization is taking place throughout the city. For example, there are seven Hope VI projects under development and last week, the DC Council approved nearly \$60 million for the *New Communities* initiative—an unprecedented plan to invest millions into the city's most distressed neighborhoods. As we work to revitalize these communities, we are mindful of the importance of strong community anchors such as vibrant schools and community centers.

This presents the challenge of ensuring that planning and budgeting efforts across all agencies are coordinated and aligned. For example, DCPS develops its capital budget separately from the city's capital budget process. In doing so, DCPS responds to its needs and priorities. Unfortunately, opportunities for leveraged investment go unrealized, as evidenced by the lack of funds budgeted for schools within various Hope VI developments. This uncoordinated capital planning sends a mixed message to communities. To address this, we have worked over the past year with a team from the Brookings Institution to reform our capital budgeting process. This will ensure coordinated capital planning across all agencies, to better integrate community development and public infrastructure projects. We have begun implementing the Brookings recommendations, such as the establishment of a Technical Review Team (TRT). The TRT used the FY06 capital budget process to vet projects and identify opportunities for cost efficiencies through co-located facilities, public private partnerships and leveraged investment in neighborhood redevelopment.

A third challenge is shifting enrollments. Between 2002 and 2004, DCPS enrollment declined by nearly 6,000 students, while charter school enrollments increased by 4,000 over the same period. To help address this challenge, the administration fully supports and encourages the "right-sizing" of DCPS' facilities inventory through consolidation, disposition, co-location and partial demolition. One of the greatest challenges facing charter schools is the ability to acquire educationally appropriate facilities. Faced with few options, charter schools use the facilities allotment given to them by the city to lease spaces in the private sector. Making DCPS space available to charter schools will help keep our public dollars invested in our public facilities.

The Administration recognizes that the DCPS Master Facility Plan, which sets the goal of modernizing or replacing all DCPS facilities over 10 to 15 years, was developed with community participation and reflected the well-intended ambitions for first class public schools for all District students. However, DCPS' financing plan did not reflect actual available funding. They identified significant sources of funds such as congressional appropriations, public/private partnerships, donations and grants that have yet to be realized. Implementing the DCPS Master Facility Plan, as it was envisioned, would require roughly \$300 million per year--almost the District's entire capital budget.

In order to be fiscally responsible and ensure that resources are spread more equitably to all schools, it is imperative that DCPS revisits the scope of its projects and prioritizes critical needs. Over the past five years, despite the nearly \$1 billion in city capital funding for DCPS, only eight out of 147 schools have been completely modernized or replaced. This year, for the first time since the Master Facility Plan was adopted, the DCPS capital budget included comprehensive renovations rather than only full-scale modernizations and replacements. This allows critical improvements to be made to more schools throughout the city. The administration applauds Superintendent Janey for taking this tremendous first step in rationalizing the DCPS capital budget.

Although scaling back projects was a first step towards a fiscally responsible DCPS Master Facility Plan, there is more to be done. The Master Facility Plan must be updated to reflect shifting enrollments, alignment with citywide initiatives, and current building conditions. We recognize that adjusting the ranking and priorities for school building improvements as established by the Master Facility Plan, as well as consolidating space in existing schools and making space available to charter schools, will require tremendous community outreach and input. We understand that by December 2005, Dr. Janey will have developed his Master Educational Plan, which will inform an updated Master Facilities Plan. The administration welcomes the opportunity to work jointly with and in support of the Superintendent in his efforts. We firmly believe that DCPS and the city share a common set of goals and we are committed to working collaboratively to best serve the residents of the District of Columbia.

This concludes my statement for the record. I thank you for the opportunity to testify before you and welcome any questions at this time.